



# 2001 Legislative Mid-Session UPDATE

Senator Larry Sheahan ■ 9th Legislative District

## Committee Assignments:

- Agriculture & International Trade
- Rules, Ranking Republican Member
- Ways & Means

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Dear Friends,

As you know, the 2001 Legislative Session was briefly interrupted by the earth telling us just how small we really are! Though the ground has stopped shaking, the shocks continue as Boeing recently announced they will be moving their corporate headquarters.

How does this affect us on the eastside? I believe Boeing's departure is a warning that some in the Puget Sound might just finally heed. Many Eastern Washington Legislators have been trying in vain to get the message across to our colleagues that our state is becoming more and more anti-agriculture and anti-business. Twelve years of Democrat Governors have given Washingtonians the 11th highest tax burden per capita in the entire nation! Maybe now that one of "Seattle's own" is speaking up, the voices of farmers and ranchers will be also be heard.

I want to keep you informed about what has transpired as we pass the halfway point of the 2001 Legislature. In this mailing you will find several issues that we have debated, deliberated and voted upon. If you see anything that sparks your interest, and you would like to voice your thoughts to me, please don't hesitate to write, call or e-mail. My office and I are here to serve you.

Your servant,

Larry Sheahan

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*Sen. Sheahan speaks to his Senate colleagues about his bill to raise money for FFA through the issuing of new FFA license plates. The bill passed the Senate unanimously.*

## FFA License Plates

The Senate approved legislation to create a special license plate to support fairs around the state. **SSB 5997** directs the money collected from the new plates to be deposited in the Department of Agriculture's fair fund. The Director of Agriculture can use the money to support area, county, district, community and youth fairs at the Director's discretion.

The Senate also passed legislation that

I sponsored to create an FFA license plate. **SSB 5571** creates a new fund so money can be used by the FFA for programs and scholarships.

## Prescription Drugs

Another effort to bring down the cost of prescription drugs passed the Senate. **SJM 8001** authorizes the Governor to explore options for cooperative drug buying with other northwestern states. Proponents of the bill argue that by pooling states' purchasing needs, lower prices can be secured from manufacturers and help control the exploding cost to the state of providing health care services.

## Privacy Rights and DNA

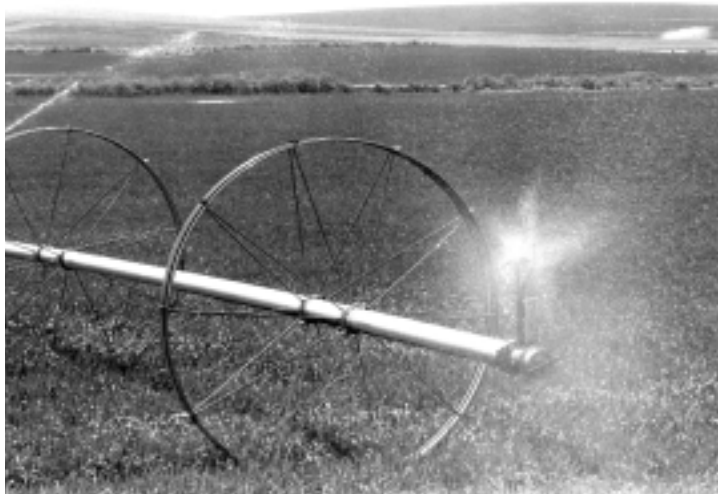
The Senate tightened requirements on the use of DNA information by insurance companies. Consumers have expressed concerns about the privacy of their genetic information. That information can be useful in predicting future disease. The Senate approved **SSB 5282** to prohibit insurance companies from screening an individual's DNA. Companies also cannot deny insurance coverage because an individual refuses to have his or her DNA tested.

## Water Rights Applications

The clogged water rights applications process got a bipartisan boost in the Senate last week when the processing was split into two lines, one for new water rights and one for transfers. The "two lines" bill (**SSB 5100**) allows transfers to be considered separately and independently from new water rights applications. The measure also allows simple applications to move ahead of more complicated ones, but still allows the latter to keep their place in line. Also, the measure addresses a court ruling that said applications for new water rights have to be considered in determining the outcome of a conflict between existing water rights. **SSB 5100** says this is not required. The bill moderately liberalizes the amount of water that can be transferred. The Governor has said he wants a solution this session to the backlog of water rights applications that is about 35 years long. **SSB 5100** is now before the House of Representatives.

Also, Pasco, Kennewick, Richland and West Richland are back in the water rights line under terms of **SB 5333**. The Senate approved the bill this week and sent it on to the House. The Department of Ecology (DOE) dumped the four cities from the line last year. The four cities were seeking water rights adequate for 50 years of growth. The problem dates to 1996 when the original request from Richland for water rights expired. DOE reinstated the request in 1997 and the other three cities joined the application. However, DOE reversed itself last June, ruling that the request had to go to the end of the line. At present rates of decision-making, that line is 35 years long. The bill passed 45-2.

**SSB 5361** cleared the Senate this week. It gives water rights holders the right to donate their rights on a



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permanent or temporary basis to the trust water right program for instream flows. The bill requires DOE to accept the donation on terms prescribed by the donor. Future water rights are protected and donations must be managed so that they qualify as federal tax-deductible gifts.

### Identifying Housing for Sexual Predators

Because of an arbitrary and unacceptable announcement concerning potential sites in Eastern Washington last year by the Department of Social and Health Services, **ESSB 5845** imposes strict guidelines on DSHS in site selection procedures. The Governor and legislative leaders support a proposal that I made last fall to not put sexual predators in Eastern Washington. McNeil Island would be used instead.

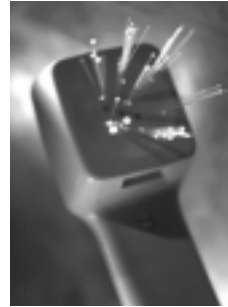
### More Power!

Though it is admittedly still a work in progress, the Senate approved **2SSB 5912** this week. The bill changes how the state's Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) conducts its business and modifies its monitoring responsibilities. Of immediate concern, it raises the threshold for EFSEC approval from 250-megawatt plants to 350-megawatt plants. Plants smaller than 350 megawatts can avoid EFSEC by working with local governments. Existing plants operating at less than 250 megawatts today can increase their production immediately to their optimal level. Senate members hope the bill will be improved further when it is considered by the House of Representatives.

### Ergonomics Rules

The controversial, so-called "ergonomics rules" were put on hold last week by the Senate. **ESB 5882** delays implementation of the rules being developed by the Department of Labor & Industries. The Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee will look at the science behind ergonomics rules and provide more education to businesses. The state's business community has argued against these rules saying they are too costly and too vague. The Senate action follows recent action by Congress repealing similar rules issued by former President Clinton. The measure still has to be approved by the House. However, there is some doubt that the Governor will sign **ESB 5882** into law if it is approved by the House.

### Telecommunications



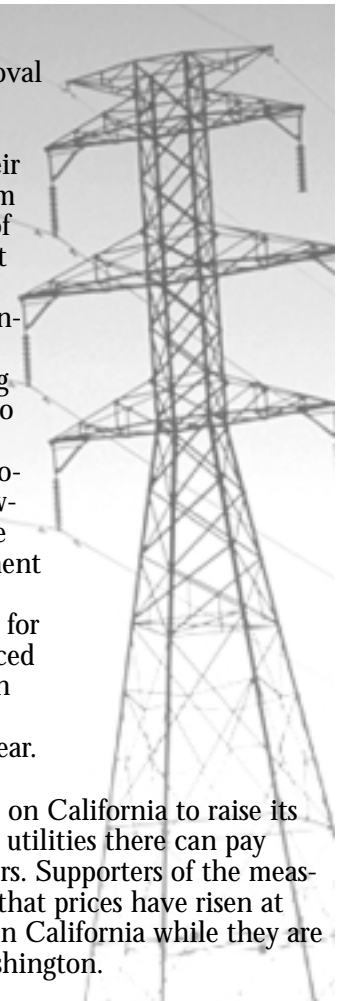
The Senate approved **SSB 5510** last week, continuing the ban on local measured service by telecommunications companies. The bill affects rural parts of the state most directly. Telephone companies will have to continue to offer fixed-rate monthly service options rather than billing based on the amount of time consumers spend on the phone.

### Agricultural Burning

With designated urban growth areas expanding, the Senate approved legislation that ensures agricultural burning rights are maintained on farms that are annexed into growth areas. **SSB 6012** allows normal agricultural burning except when there is an air quality emergency.

### Energy

The Senate gave its approval to a package of energy bills. State agencies will have to conduct energy audits of their own facilities and make them more efficient under terms of **SSB 5647**. New government buildings will have to meet stricter energy efficiency standards. The Senate also approved **ESJM 8012** calling on the federal government to bring short-term wholesale energy costs down and to provide energy assistance to low-income people. The measure calls on the federal government to ensure that Washington power providers will be paid for the electricity they were forced to sell to California under an order from the Clinton Administration issued last year. Finally, the Senate voted in favor of **SSJM 8015**, calling on California to raise its retail power rates so electric utilities there can pay Washington power generators. Supporters of the measure continue to be irritated that prices have risen at less than double-digit rates in California while they are skyrocketing in parts of Washington.





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## Multiple Sclerosis

Eastern Washington suffers from one of the highest rates of multiple sclerosis in the world. Nobody knows why that is. The Senate this week approved **SB 5220** authorizing a full study of the problem.

## Economic Growth

Cities, towns and counties are given new tax incentives to promote economic growth in distressed areas by legislation approved in the Senate. **SSB 5720** allows local governments to establish tax increment financing districts. Seventy-five percent of new tax revenues generated by development in those districts will remain in the districts to pay for necessary public improvements like sewers. The remainder of the money goes into the general budget. State property taxes used to pay for schools are not affected.

## Signatures for Initiatives

On a 34-15 vote, the Senate voted to send a constitutional amendment to the November ballot that would require signatures for petitions be gathered over a broad geographic range. **2SSJR 8206** requires that at least six of the state's Congressional districts have valid signatures equal to at least 1/9th of the required signature total statewide. Under current law, for initiatives to qualify for the ballot, the total number of petition signatures required is equal to 1/8th of the votes cast in the most recent Governor's election.

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